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An older white man wearing a blue shirt, black jacket and clerical collar speaks into a microph

Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, the Italian prelate chosen by Pope Francis to lead an initiative for peace in Ukraine, is pictured in a May 27, 2022, photo. (OSV News photo/Yara Nardi, Reuters)



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Vatican City — June 27, 2023
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Italian Cardinal Matteo Zuppi will go to Moscow on the second leg of a peace mission on behalf of Pope Francis, the Vatican said.

The cardinal, president of the Italian bishops' conference, was scheduled to travel to Moscow June 28 and 29 accompanied by an official by the Vatican Secretariat of State, the Vatican press office said June 27.

"The principal aim of the initiative is to encourage humanitarian gestures that may contribute to favoring a solution to the tragic current situation and finding ways of reaching a just peace," the statement said.

The Vatican did not provide a list of the people Zuppi would meet in Russia.

The cardinal had gone to Ukraine June 5-6, visiting Kyiv and the suburb of Bucha, where hundreds of civilians were found killed -- some bound and shot execution style -- after it was freed from Russian occupation.

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During that trip he met with Ukrainian officials including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The president wrote on his telegram channel June 6 that he and the cardinal discussed "humanitarian cooperation in the framework of the Ukrainian Peace Formula," a plan that calls for a complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine and international prosecution of Russian war crimes.

"Only united efforts, diplomatic isolation and pressure on Russia can influence the aggressor and bring a just peace to the Ukrainian land," the president had written.

Upon his return from Ukraine Zuppi said that the pope directed the mission "precisely because he wants to seek out everything that might further the path of peace."

He noted that the purpose of his mission was not "mediation," but to show the interest and closeness of the pope and to listen "so that the conflict might find pathways to peace."